

CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF CYRUS H. McCORMICK.

By Rev. W. W. Moore, D. D.

On the fifteenth of February, 1809, an epoch-maker was born in Rockbridge county, Virginia, Cyrus Hall McCormick by name. He was of Scotch-Irish descent and received the old-fashioned, wholesome, character-making Presbyterian training. When only fifteen years old, he made a grain-cradle for his own use in the harvest field and swung it over many a broad acre of wheat, keeping his place among the full-grown hands on his father's farm. That boy was destined to release millions of his fellowmen from the severe toil, of which he then had a practical experience, by inventing a machine for cutting grain by horsepower and to link his name for all time with three great departments of human interest, industry, education and religion—by the liberal and judicious use of the large wealth which came to him through his beneficent invention. In 1816, just seven years after he had made the light cradle for his boyish strength, Cyrus McCormick produced the first successful reaping machine, fashioning with his own hands every part of it, both in wood and iron, in the carpenter and blacksmith shops on his father's farm. It consisted of a vibrating blade to cut, a platform to receive the falling grain, and a reel to bring the standing grain within reach of the blade. The reaper was tested in a field of six acres of oats, near Walnut Grove, the McCormick homestead, midway between Lexington and Staunton, and astonished all who witnessed its work. But none of those then present, not even the young inventor himself, however far-seeing and sanguine, could have foretold all the vast consequences which were to flow from that triumph of his genius. For, not only has it revolutionized the whole method of farming in the areas then cultivated, but it has opened the mighty empire of the northwest, by making possible its enormous crops of grain, and thus stimulating the construction of thousands of miles of railway, and peopling half a continent with prosperous settlers.

The reaper has benefited in the same way South America, New Zealand, Australia, Great Britain, France, Russia and other countries of the world.

Cyrus H. McCormick was the eldest of eight children, six of whom lived to grow up. His father, Robert McCormick, in addition to farming, had workshops of considerable importance on his farm, as well as a saw mill, a grist mill and smelting furnaces, and was himself an inventor, having devised and built a thresher, a hemp-breaker, various mill improvements, and having even made some beginnings on a mechanical reaper, which however was not a success. It remained for his son to discover and apply the true principle of the reaper which was to revolutionize the grain harvests of the world. As already stated, he turned out the first machine in 1831, but it was only after the disastrous panic of 1837 that he began in earnest the manufacture and sale of the machines in company with his father and his two brothers, William and Leander.

The first consignment sent to the western prairies in 1844 was taken in wagons from Walnut Grove to

Scottsville, then down the James River Canal to Richmond, thence by water to New Orleans and then up the Mississippi and Ohio rivers to Cincinnati. As the west, with its vast prairies, was the natural market for the reaper, Mr. McCormick in the fall of the same year (1844) went to Cincinnati and began manufacturing there. Seeing in a short time that Chicago was the best center for the reaper business, he moved to that city in 1846.

The machine was first brought to the attention of the British public at the World's Fair in London, in 1851. At first it was the subject of some ridicule: the London Times called it "a cross between an Astley (circus) chariot, a wheelbarrow, and a flying machine." But in a few weeks, when, after prolonged tests, the Great Council medal was awarded the inventor, "the Thunderer" changed front completely and admitted that the McCormick reaper was equal in value to the entire cost of the exhibition. In 1867, at the exposition in Paris, Mr. McCormick was decorated by the Emperor of France with the Cross of the Legion of Honor for his valuable and successful invention. In 1878, when he was called to Paris for the third time to receive the Grand Prize of the Exposition, he was elected a corresponding member of the French Academy of Sciences, "as having done more for the cause of agriculture than any other living man." In the language of the faculty of Washington and Lee University, "It is not too much to say that no man in all history has achieved so much for the progress of that branch of industry which is universally recognized as the basis of individual comfort and national prosperity."

We have given with some fullness these facts in regard to Mr. McCormick's influence upon the material interests of mankind for the purpose of emphasizing the statement, paradoxical as it may appear, that his influence upon the higher interests of the race was still greater and more beneficent. He did not think more of machines than of souls. For fifty years he was a consistent, earnest, fruitful member of the Presbyterian Church, and from the earliest days of his prosperity to the end of his honored life, he was the large-hearted and open-handed friend of educational and religious institutions, ever ready to help them with his sympathy, his prayers, his counsel and his means. In every part of the country, north, south, east and west, there are churches, academies, colleges and seminaries which today are flourishing and doing a great work for God, because of the timely and generous assistance he gave them in their days of poverty and struggle. He never ceased to love his native state. Two of her venerable and useful institutions held specially warm place in his heart: Washington and Lee University in his native county, and Union Theological Seminary. It is well known that he gave to the former a handsome sum, and that in 1866, when our seminary seemed doomed because of financial losses by the war, he gave \$30,000 for the endowment of the chair of Hebrew and the Interpretation of the Old Testament. Had it not been for the liberality of Cyrus H. McCormick in those dark days, Union Seminary would not have been able to do for the Church, at least on the same scale, the